

LISTING OF THE CLAIMS:

This listing of the claims will replace all prior versions and listings of the claims in the application:

Claims 1-44 (cancelled)

45. (currently amended) A method of making a protein product useful as a fat substitute or thickening agent, said method comprising the steps of:

acid-hydrolyzing a whey protein preparation to produce a hydrolyzed whey protein preparation, the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation having a salt concentration of between 0 and 100 mM;

heating said hydrolyzed whey protein preparation to form a whey protein gel; and introducing said whey protein gel into a composition, the gel being introduced in an amount sufficient to enhance the retention of water in said composition.

46. (previously presented) A method according to claim 45, wherein said acid hydrolyzing step is carried out with an acid selected from the group consisting of hydrochloric acid, sulfuric acid, citric acid, acetic acid, phosphoric acid, polyphosphoric acid, phytic acid, oxalic acid, succinic, maleic acid, fumaric acid, and lactic acid.

47. (currently amended) A method according to claim 45, wherein said heating step comprises heating said hydrolyzed whey protein ~~concentrate~~preparation to form a weak fine-stranded gel.

48. (previously presented) A method according to claim 45, wherein said acid-hydrolyzing and heating steps are carried out at a pH of 4 or less.

49. (currently amended) A method according to claim 45, wherein said heating step comprises heating said hydrolyzed whey protein ~~concentrate~~preparation to form an FS-II gel.

50. (New) A method according to claim 45, wherein said hydrolyzed whey protein preparation has a salt concentration of between 0 and 50 mM.

51. (New) A method of making a protein product useful as a fat substitute or thickening agent, said method comprising the steps of:

denaturing a protein preparation to produce a denatured protein preparation, the denatured protein preparation having a salt concentration of between 0 and 100 mM;

heating said denatured protein preparation to form a protein gel; and

introducing said protein gel into a composition, the protein gel being introduced in an amount sufficient to enhance the retention of water in said composition.

52. (New) A method according to claim 51, wherein said denaturing step is carried out with an acid selected from the group consisting of hydrochloric acid, sulfuric acid, citric acid, acetic acid, phosphoric acid, polyphosphoric acid, phytic acid, oxalic acid, succinic, maleic acid, fumaric acid, and lactic acid.

53. (New) A method according to claim 51, wherein said heating step comprises heating said denatured protein preparation to form a weak fine-stranded gel.

54. (New) A method according to claim 51, wherein said denaturing and heating steps are carried out at a pH of 4 or less.

55. (New) A method according to claim 51, wherein said heating step comprises heating said denatured protein preparation to form an FS-II gel.

56. (New) A method according to claim 51, wherein said denatured protein preparation has a salt concentration of between 0 and 50 mM.